

# **The Middle East -- Where we have been and What we need to do now! July 16, 2006**

**An informal e-mail response to  
Major General Carroll D. Childers USA (Ret)  
P.E. Consultant**

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Dear General Carroll D. Childers:

I have to surmise that you mean the present situation in Iraq and Afghanistan, rather than the many areas covered in my lengthy treatise such as those that occurred during the Korea and Vietnam Wars. If so, I will make an attempt to better express myself in that regard. But please note that I do not pretend or purport to be a trained strategist, or tactician, or "expert" of any consequence in any field.

That said, I had been in touch in the past and while working in Saudi Arabia with General Chuck Krulak (my former peer), and the then Commandant of the Marine Corps in 1998. I explained to him that we had former military pilots, surveyors, engineers, scientists, security specialists, geologists, logisticians, operations specialists, and remote camp and barge administrators working in Aramco, and who had in some case spent 20 to 30 years or more in the Middle East and who could be of great benefit to our armed forces and the spooks, were they to be queried for the expertise and the vast knowledge that they possessed in that part of the world. Krulak acknowledged that this was an untapped national asset, and submitted his recommendation to use these assets to the then Secretary of the Navy, and then the recommendation was quickly allowed to die on the vine. Apparently, spooks and others do not like information gathering outside of their immediate groups or from people they believe to be unqualified, and so they remain blind to much and sadly when they could otherwise have up-to-date and oft times reliable information. I have no answers to this foolish phenomena, other than misplaced pride and at the probable expense of many in the end.

The problem in the Middle East is that we tend to rely on the "expertise" of individuals with imposing lists of degrees, and in some cases occasional experience in the regions to back it up. However, these are most often people with a year or two in country (some spooks, some military, and some Ambassadors or General Counsels), as well as some who have studied the language and to a certain extent the cultures for business or educational purposes. However, these folks tend to associate with like minded scholars or influential personages, and as a consequence receive a jaded or sometimes incorrect view of the common people's true views. And thus, they are often uninformed of many of the issues or major underlying problems of the given region and which are of

major importance to the common folks. The Shah of Iran and Fidel Castro, are but two excellent examples of our inability to understand the common man's desires and issues at hand, until too late.

We former Aramco employees near fell over in laughter, when George H. Bush was briefed at Aramco in Saudi Arabia long ago, as the Saudi's had long before determined what he might want to hear, and then threw in a few minor social issues in order to make it sound as though it was a balanced briefing. The truth was GWB got the usual "all is well" dog and pony show, which I have often noted in briefings to GO's as well. GHB left pleased and smiling as were those of his staff, even though many serious issues like the continuing terrorist activities, which were lightly addressed as were other major issues and difficulties with the oil and gas exportation and pricing.

I was once a briefing officer in MAAG China and a few other places as well, and so believe that I have at least a passing knowledge of these type of these sometimes mis-information methods and briefing, and which I might add causes many to believe they have a full grasp of the issues when they have been intentionally deceived by others with differing agendas. Therefore, I still believe that the skewering of information during briefings still occurs often enough, and we former occasional briefer are fully aware that the information is or was often tainted at best, however, we, at least in my day, not allowed to brief the true situation or the unreported issues by our immediate seniors, lest our Fitness Reports include our rebelliousness.

The problems in both Afghanistan and Iraq are unique due to their past histories, their religious and cultural schisms and beliefs, as well as their views of their nearby neighboring nations and those of outsiders. In Afghanistan for instance, we went in with a great plan for defeating the Taliban and other Terrorist elements to include Al Qaeda, but failed to properly plan for how we would handle the national drug growing issues, that for many, were and remain their livelihood that extended for generations. And so, while defeating the main enemy forces with both spectacular and rapid success, we failed to properly consider our follow-up and follow-on goals and missions for controlling that nation through it's newly established western style government. Furthermore, we appeared to be totally confused with the culture, the mores, the tribal and religious responsibilities and loyalties, as well as with the bargaining norms and fleeting associations, which are often based on temporary familial or tribal usefulness, and not as an acceptance of western ideals or philosophies.

In this region, we are attempting to bring these mostly poor and uneducated people from a pre-19th century culture to one of the 21st century almost overnight, and seem to be chagrined that new TV's and radios, new cars and trucks, a Western style government, and an attempt to build a military and police force almost overnight has not been enthusiastically supported by the majority of the people. And they for the most part, remain the poor, and are unable to change their entire way of life in a few years, or to quickly embrace Western ideals and methods as their own concepts.

Most people of the world are poor farmers and Afghanistan is no exception, regardless of whether growing now illegal opium poppies, or corn, or wheat. Their daily and annual fortunes or misfortunes are based on the weather, and with their ability to pay or borrow for seeds, which then allows them to begin a new planting season. We have attempted to replace opium poppy growing with corn and other crops, but the problem is that both corporate buyers (mainly Warlords) and the farmers are well aware that the remuneration for growing poppies verses other crops is considerable, and so they continue to grow an illegal crop as is the case in Colombia SA, as they can then better support and provide for their families although there is more risk in doing so. I do not pretend to have the overall solution, but if the government were to subsidize farmers with a reasonable return on their crops, as well as providing a guarantee of seeds for future crops, then many might take that route if given that opportunity and with government assurances. The overall problem will not be resolved until the Warlords and drug smugglers are removed or imprisoned for lengthy stays, and with the continuing war remaining fluid, that will take some time to accomplish.

However, long-range plans should be prepared for the present government's future use. In Afghanistan, we must continue our presence until the region is more stabilized, as otherwise, it will simply return to the control of the Taliban or Al Qaeda followers, that is, were we decide to leave them to their own devices at the present time. What we should be doing is using massive weaponry on the Taliban and other fighters opposing the government, and we should take few prisoners as they are often back on the streets after very short periods of interrogations and incarcerations, and so go back to their own just as our own drug dealers do here in the USA.

Hammering the enemy from the air with aircraft and drones, along with long range artillery and rocketry, should be increased in my humble opinion, and to much higher levels and with many large areas labeled as non- entry zones, as anyone found there will be considered the enemy and will be fired upon when found. B-52s and B-1 bombers should be used more often and in much larger numbers, as they will scare the be Jesus out of anyone to include yours truly, that is, if at the receiving end of a bomb run or even of being near one. This not only lowers the morale of the enemy, it also causes them to reconsider their dedication to both their religious beliefs to Allah and their loyalty to their local leaders. Knowing that they and others might soon become nothing more than a clump of unfound dirt, will often times cause many to reconsider their desire visit Allah sooner than later. I also believe we have far too many military convoys traipsing about with questionable purposes, and which then makes this means of travel much more susceptible to IEDs, ambushes, and the like. Helicopters and walking or hiking should be the main means of traveling where needed by our service members, as the alternative of truck and vehicle convoys is where we usually take our major losses of men and materials.

I would prefer that in Afghanistan that many more OPs, Recon, and small unit insertions, as well as that air and drone intelligence be provided to allow for our air and artillery to nail the enemy relentlessly, rather attempting to supervise and control all going on in that country with our own personnel. Like the wandering Bedouins, who

travel with their sheep and camel herds across the mainly coastal lands of the Middle Eastern countries, and all while both fully armed with often ancient weapons and always sans passports or visas, the Afghani's remain likewise fully armed only now with military grade weapons either given, confiscated, bought, or stolen from the Russians and later from the Americans and other NATO forces. Owning a weapon to an Afghani is considered both a birthright and is now an ingrained part of the culture, and as such it will be difficult to disarm that nation. Most would be averse to relinquishing their weapons, as it is as much a display of manhood and status as it is a necessity for Warlords and Mullahs (otherwise no private armies), as well as tribes, and merchants (to protect from theft).

In my view the solution is not to disarm them per se, but rather to allow them civilian type weapons such as .22s, shotguns and the like which can still be lethal, but are less useful for major combat engagements. This again would be a long process and difficult undertaking, but the first steps must be taken if that region is ever going to attain any semblance of peace and stability. The last thing we need to do there for the foreseeable future is to allow Christian clerics and missionaries to enter that country, as to do otherwise would allow the Mullahs to have a field day on our true intentions, and the kidnappings and killing would soon become an on-going crisis, which is neither needed nor wanted particularly at the present time.

Iraq is a much different story, but like Afghanistan it is much easier to point out our past errors than to project our present and future needs and options. I saw General Alexander Haig on TV last night, and was very pleased to hear him admit a number of times on the naiveté of both himself and the various staffs in which he had worked with or was assigned to, and which stretched from the Eisenhower era to his last positions as Secretary of State under Ronald Reagan, as well as that of NATO Commander. What he stated was what many of us who follow both history and the national and international news had determined and stated in writings long, long ago. Perhaps, many of us who neither attended nor graduated from the more renowned educational institutions, or for that matter the more senior military War Colleges and Universities, expected far too much from these mere mortal men and women, and ones who simply possessed more active and seemingly brighter minds than the vast majority of us lacking in such qualities and backgrounds.

While many suspected that some of the more esteemed amongst us did not always possess the knowledge and capabilities they were touted to have had, their true naivete was sometimes displayed during their public appearances, on TV or radio, or in their writings. The general American public is now discovering what many of us realized long ago and that is that: "The Best and Brightest" often times are neither, and we have often placed many in positions of authority when they in fact lacked in talents in character, in morals, in knowledge, in leadership qualities, in faith, in scruples, in the ideals and belief of self abnegation, and in the concept of nation over self benefit. The opposite occurs when individuals seek notice through financial gain, personal imagery, or symbolic positions of status, and usually at the expense of others.

The questions for many is how do we extricate ourselves from this unpalatable situation that began with a quick and sensational military victory against the major Iraqi military forces, and has since been mired in untold Iraqi casualties and seemingly never ending guerilla warfare and daily terrorist attacks. Before I suggest what we might do now, we might take a quick look at where we have been in the latest Iraqi intervention. I like many others could list the numerous errors we made after our successful defeat of the major Iraqi armed forces units, but I think we are all aware of them now and they need not be restated. However, we need to look at some of our true objectives as what has been reported and what we are actually doing seem at times at odds.

For instance, we are in the process of building the largest embassy in the world in Baghdad, which consists of 104 acres of prime property along the banks of the Tigris river, and near one of Saddam's long despised palaces. If as suggested by our leadership, we intend to pull out when the Iraqi's are able to govern themselves without our support, then why erect such a large and ostentatious structure in the midst of the city of Baghdad, and which is already causing many Iraqi's to believe that we never intended to leave? Again, our lack of understanding or concern for the views and suspicions of the average Iraqi citizen on this and many other issues, is yet more evidence of people of limited knowledge being placed in positions of authority, and who are creating future conflict while remaining oblivious to the obvious disdain of Iraqi's to this gigantic, costly, and unsightly display of pomposity and arrogance.

So while I would say don't build this monstrosity that is bound to alienate the Iraqi's, I know it will not be stopped and like so many of our past mistakes, we will not be able to undo what has already done or been approved. Perhaps this structure, more than anything else will be the beacon of what not to do in a country, where we neither know or are aware of the culture, the language, the religious beliefs, the society as a whole, or the desires of the various religious and cultural schisms and groupings within that country.

The idea of installing a western style government with voting rights for all, seems both practical and popular on the surface, at least from a western perspective. However, the country of Iraq was formed after WWI by the British and that was done with little regard for the three major opposing religious and cultural grouping, and so it took a strong dictator like Saddam and his predecessor to control the population and prevent the endless civil wars that would have otherwise occurred. How well the tenuous democratically elected governments will survive in both Afghanistan and Iraq, is a flip of the coin at best, as there are many neighboring countries seeking to destabilize those countries as well as those entire regions of the world. And so the present governing forms in both countries are fragile at best, and will remain so for the foreseeable future, at least in my humble opinion.

What should we do now? Well, it is now too difficult and too late to impose harsher methods on the population, as we should have done at the onset, and to include disarming the population and shooting any who disobeyed that edict. Worse yet, the new governments of both Iraq and Afghanistan are now making noises of wanting to try

and punish our own military members for real or imagined infractions of the International Land Warfare rules. That would also include Sharia law which is often brutal for even minor offenses. Meantime, our own military and civilian lawyers seem more concerned with imposing international warfare standards on our military members, rather than on relying on our own Constitution and the UCMJ, and so to me they should be held at arms length by General Officers, at least in my opinion.

I do not mean to disparage all lawyers, as we have many excellent and patriotic ones in both the civilian and military sectors, but we also have a number with little or no experience and who are internationalist by choice, and so they should be kept on very tight leashes particularly while overseas. The solutions now are more obscure, because we have allowed our own forces to become as reviled by many as are the terrorists. That we are relentlessly defeating the terrorist elements in Iraq is a given, and so from one viewpoint all is going according to plan. However, we are also sustaining casualties and while not large in numbers for so long a war, the almost daily occurrences of more American casualties has caused a lowering of morale and support by the American public, as eventually occurred in Vietnam.

The solution to me for now, is to stop the endless convoys of military vehicles that seem to be the primary targets of the enemy, and getting engineers checking roadways, and before the convoys are sent out with overhead armed drones and helicopters, as well as other aircraft running surveillance and interdiction for any convoys of any size being sent out. By now, there should be sufficient Iraqi police and forces to control Baghdad and several other major cities, and so our troops should be placed in more secure and more defensible locations, and away from city centers as well as roadways with houses or building structures adjoining the roadways. If roads of this nature must be used, then the removal of adjoining structures must become a priority, not only for our forces but also those of the new Iraqi forces and also for daylight and nighttime surveillance. Specific roadways should have signs informing the public that any found lingering at the edges of the roadways will be considered hostiles and will be taken out without warnings. Disarming the Iraqi's of military grade weaponry should be much easier than in Afghanistan, as it was not a norm under the Saddam regime to arm the citizenry as only his own military, police, and hoodlums were allowed to be armed, although some concessions along this line was given a few tribal groups. The point is if the population remains armed with military grade weapons, then the chaotic scenes of present day Iraq will continue on for the foreseeable future.

The lessons learned are that should we have to invade a country in the future: we should conquer completely and any resistance should be summarily and harshly be eliminated; we must subjugate the population in order to prevent any forms of future resistance; we should immediately establish after major hostilities cease, a military governing body along the lines of MacArthur in Japan and Eisenhower in Germany, and to enable firm control of all (and avoid the bungling of people like L. Paul Bremer); we need to select a governing national body and direct their constitution as we did after WWII and which will be established by edict and in a very short period of time; we need to establish our military bases and posts where we select and are based military

security and needs, and not what civilians and business groups might prefer; we need to keep the police and military intact and weed out the opposition in a methodical yet relentless order, while retraining new conscripts or volunteers as replacements; we need to insure that hostile prisoners are quickly tried and immediately dispatched if that is the tribunal's sentence; we need to build or rebuild the infrastructure and begin people- to- people service type programs, but only after all the above has been completed as it is simple insanity to attempt to do all of this simultaneously and in the midst of on-going conflict.

Much of the above cannot be done now as we have passed through many of the above phases, and so pulling back relatively out of harms way seems more prudent than to continue taking almost daily losses and casualties in a very much hostile environment. The reasoning previously promoted by our recent "Best and Brightest" has proven to be more akin to that of Robert S. MacNamra, whose team eventually became the "Worst and the Dumbest." Admittedly, I remain unsure of what to do with the present democratically elected government in Iraq, as we suspect and now had it confirmed that many now in the government are supporters of the terrorists groups, or are in fact members of those groups or other anti-Coalition Forces. This was proven when the terrorist Al Zarkawi's notebook was found amongst the ruins when he was recently killed by air strikes. Under a US. military governing body these elected officials would have been immediately jailed or worse, but they would most assuredly have been dismissed from the governing body. And yet we now remain incapable of forcing the elected body to dismiss these obviously hostile elements.

I do not know how one fights a war while simultaneously attempting to use often conflicting US. civil law and International standards, as viewed and determined by the diplomats and lawyers of many nations. Logically, we would be better off using Russian or Red Chinese Communist Law (which provides for quick disposition of issues and people) than to rely on the obscurities of International laws and tribunals, or even our own civil laws as we are in a war and civil solutions are not sensibly applicable in my estimation. Our choices are to continue under the same conditions that have existed for the past 3 years and hope for an eventual end to the conflict, or pull out altogether and let them solve their own problems, or insist on the ridding of the elected officials of the opposition, and thereby allowing for one more opportunity to either dissolve the nation and reform it into the three major Provinces of pre-WWI, or alternatively to reunite as one nation and under their present constitution.

My comments above could all be negated by the present Israeli, Lebanese, Syrian, Hezbollah and Hamas conflict, and particularly if Israel elects to attack either or both Syria and Iran. If we are ever to find peace in the Middle East, then the governments of Syria and Iran must be replaced, and the question remains of who is willing to do it. Sadly these are not our only problems with enemy nations, as we still have the Red Chinese Communists and resurgent Russian Communists who are bent on global expansion and the demise of the USA as a world superpower.

Then we also have the Latino terrorists and hostile Latino nations, who likewise seek our demise and eventual subjugation and yet we seem to place these nations and groups on the back burner, as though all can wait until we decide what to do in the Middle East. I believe we are courting disaster and very few are sounding the alerts to these many other important issues, and so slowly but relentlessly we are being surrounded by hostile elements, both from without and within.

While my views are based on my military experiences, my civilian travels and work, as well as my frequent readings, they are simply an expression of my own personal views on the various issues as discussed above, and so I expect many with much better credentials than I will ever possess are bound to disagree with some or all of it. I accept that as a normal exchange of viewpoints, but feel obligated to express that which I can neither control nor influence. I sincerely thank you for asking for my opinions and views, as it is very much appreciated that anyone of prominence will take my opinions seriously, and even if at odds with all or some of my conclusions.

Perhaps, my occasional abilities are to take the more complex issues and then attempt to express them in a more simplified and understandable format, and so that a larger audience can better comprehend the issues at hand and the alternatives available, or else the pros and cons of various courses of action and their most probable results. I thank you for your kind words and questions and I hope that I have expressed in writing that which you sought.

VRS, Major Frank C. Stolz, USMC Ret.

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